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SUBJECT: NAJAF LEADERS ASKED USG TO HELP FUND IDP CAMP PROJECTS

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This is a PRT Reporting Cable

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Members of the Najaf Provincial Council (PC) requested USG assistance to fund some Najaf projects, especially at the internally displaced persons (IDP) camp, during a November 8 Najaf PRT visit to the IDP camp in Manathera and a subsequent meeting at the PC offices. Ali Al Fayad, Director General (DG) of the Najaf Department of Displacement and Migration, pleaded immediately for USG funds to secure a school for the 265 families residing at the IDP camp at the beginning of the meeting. He noted that children were injured by oncoming traffic as they crossed highways to reach a school two miles away. In addition, during a walkthrough of the camp, PRT members noted that most families were living in made-shift tents. Ali underscored the importance of upgrading to caravans for the families as winter approaches but also lamented the lack of financial support from both the USG and Baghdad. More positively, Ali assured PRT Leader that the camp residents have complete freedom of movement, and that sufficient food is provided by the Public Distribution System (PDS). In terms of security, each family had to provide detailed personal information in order to register as camp residents and receive official identification. The meeting ended on a positive note as the DG stated that some former Baghdad residents have begun returning to Baghdad in the last two months, though he added that Najaf is still receiving IDPs from other provinces. END SUMMARY

¶2. (U) On November 8, Najaf PRT Leader and members observed acceptable living conditions during a first visit to the IDP camp in Manathera that was established by the Red Crescent in March this year. The PRT met with Ali Al Fayad, Director General (DG) of the Najaf Department of Displacement and Migration (MoDM), Dr. Muneer Al Ja'aafri, a PC member and Chair of the PC IDP Committee, Dr. Nawal Al Ibrahimi (female), a member of the PC and its IDP Committee, and Mazin Al Shihani, a Baghdad PC member and Chair of Baghdad PC IDP Committee. DG Ali asked immediately for the USG help in setting up a new school for children of the camp. He also stated that all the made-shift resident tents have to be upgraded to covered caravans for the winter, which at present are too costly to purchase. Other issues discussed included medical help, freedom of movement, and camp registration, all of which were satisfactory. The PC offered no long-term strategy in resettling the Manathera and other IDP residents, however.

Funds to Build a School on Site

¶3. (SBU) Right off the bat, DG Ali lamented at the beginning of the meeting of "too little support" from the USG and pleaded for funding to help build a school for the children who settled at the Manathera camp. He also complained that funds promised by the central government were not delivered to help out the IDP

camp, which is already at full capacity. Around 2500 people currently reside at the camp, 550 of which are children. The nearest school is located two miles away and children of all ages walk to the school. Several children were involved in traffic accidents crossing several major roads during their daily commute. The DG had several ideas for the children including building a 6-caravan/classroom school on site, or purchasing several buses to transport the children to school. DG Ali quoted the price of USD18,000 for each of these bigger schoolroom caravans. He indicated that the PC will supply school teachers and school materials if the location can be built. (Note: PRT will attempt to fund this through a QRF project. End Note) Building a school appeared to be DG Ali's top concern for the Manathera camp.

200 Caravans Needed, Only 117 Funded

¶4. (U) During a walkthrough of the PRT group with DG Ali, PRT members noticed the deteriorating conditions of the made-shift tents, some of which were torn. Ali indicated that sandstorms often destroy the tents, and in addition, the tents need to be upgraded to caravans before winter arrives. According to Ali, some PC funds initially budgeted for building a school elsewhere had been reallocated to Manathera, although he did not indicate the total amount. These funds have been earmarked for the purchase of 117 caravans, some of which were already installed at the time of the visit. A total of 200 caravans is needed but the budget allows only for the purchase of 117, falling short by 83 caravans. Each caravan, costing USD5000 each, comes with windows, air-conditioning, and a bathroom with plumbing. The price appears comparable if delivery is included.

Madhlum for Najaf-born Persons Only

¶5. (U) On the question of resettlement efforts at Madhlum, another area in Najaf designated for IDPs, DG Ali preferred to refer to it as the Madhlum "low-income housing" area, to distinguish it from Manathera. He stated that Madhlum is only

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offered to low-income "Najaf residents," thereby reaffirming earlier PRT reporting that Madhlum disqualifies most IDPs with its requirement of Najaf-born residents only. While Manathera camp was created to host IDPs who were living in random areas of Najaf city, Madhlum was designated for Najaf-born persons only.

Registration, Freedom of Movement, Medical Care

¶6. (U) DG Ali assured PRT Leader that each entrant to camp is vetted through a thorough registration process requiring detailed personal information. A PDS card is required for registration, and in return, food and fuel rations are provided to the residents. The province does not receive in return any reimbursement from Baghdad for the food and fuel expenses, however. The DG office issues an official letter to successful applicants, along with an identification number and card. With the card, all camp residents are free to leave the area as they wish. Some managed to find work in the city. There is also a medical facility on site that coordinates with the DG hospital in the city. The facility charges a nominal fee for medicine.

Rumbling Below the Surface?

¶7. (SBU) Although the camp appears tranquil during the visit, and DG Ali assured PRT Leader that disputes among residents were settled peacefully, PRT member observed the annoyance of one resident against the PRT visit. During the PRT group's walkthrough of the camp, a woman dressed in an abaya abruptly snatched away her infant toddler who stood with other children, curious at the spectacle of "the visiting Americans." She walked away in disgust carrying the crying child and disappeared into one of the tents.

Biography: DG Ali Al Fayad

¶8. (SBU) Ali resides in Karbala and travels regularly to

Manathera to manage the camp. A soft-spoken and direct person, Ali appears to be frank in his opinion of the USG and the central government. He was born in 1969 in Thi-Qar province and graduated from the Teachers Institute in Thi-Qar province. He is currently a third year law student at the College of Law in Karbala, in addition to being the Director General of Najaf at the Ministry of Displacement and Migration. He is married and has no party affiliation.

19. (SBU) COMMENT: Although living conditions at the Manathera camp appeared acceptable, the camp only hosts 265 families, or approximately five percent, of the 10,000 IDP families currently residing in Najaf. Each day, 20 to 30 new families still enter Najaf from Baghdad. These numbers are an improvement from the 70 or so families who used to move to Najaf everyday during the height of sectarian violence in Baghdad. Most significantly, starting two months ago, Najaf province started to see the returning of some Baghdad IDPs back to the capital, although there are still refugees arriving in Najaf from other (Sunni majority) provinces. The DG indicated that around 150 IDP families in Najaf have thus far returned to Baghdad. Whether more IDPs would return to Baghdad, and begin a trend, depends highly on the security situation in Baghdad, which has improved in some areas of Baghdad to the point where some Shi'a refugees have prepared to give return a chance. END COMMENT

SIMMONS

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